The Soldier and the Battlefield, as Seen in Military Mail

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As part of an analysis of military mail addressed to TAKAHASHI Minejiro, this paper attempts to shed light, through the study of military mail, on the actions taken at the battlefield by soldiers in the war with China and the views harbored by these soldiers regarding the war. Previous research regarding military mail addressed to TAKAHASHI Minejiro focused on the angle of the farmer-soldier, illustrating the soldiers' views on the lives of the Chinese farmers who lived on the land where the battles were fought. The aspect of the soldiers with regard to their participation in the war between Japan and China, therefore, was left for further research to unveil.

Previously, it was believed that censorship prevented writers from expressing their true thoughts in military mail. Recently, however, a study published by KOIKE Yoshiyuki dealing with military mail in Asaba town in Shizuoka Prefecture revealed evidence in military mail of guilt in the war of aggression. One of the objectives of this paper is to further expand on the results of the above research.

This paper introduces the state of combat, as depicted in military mail correspondence sent by TAKAHASHI Tokumatsu, CHIBA Tokuemon, KIKUCHI Seiemon, ISHIKAWA Shohichi, TAKAHASHI Sentaro, TAKAHASHI Tokubei, KIKUCHI Hachibei, and KATO Seiichi.

Regarding the state of combat, the letters reveal how Japanese soldiers killed Chinese citizens, including women and children, and prisoners and stragglers, burnt the people's houses and plundered them of their belongings. On the other hand, the letters also show how the Chinese army, who were looked down upon by the Japanese, strengthened ties among the Chinese people and put up a fierce resistance. In addition, there are descriptions of cities, devastated from the attacks and bombing by the Japanese army, with dead bodies left lying in the streets, and accounts of how the Japanese army maintained control of the occupied territories by use of military force, establishing a puppet government and "Japanizing" the territories, as if they were Japanese colonies. There is also indication of the army preparing for poison gas warfare. In this way, the military mail sent by the farmer-soldiers provides evidence that Japan's war with China was in fact a war of aggression, inflicting an enormous amount of misfortune, damage, and pain on the people of China, with war crimes also being committed.

The military mail also reveals that the farmer-soldiers accepted without question the ideologies put forth by the Japanese army to justify the war, that they enjoyed killing Chinese soldiers and other such acts, that they regarded the Chinese as being miserable, that they were glad to be born Japanese, and that they believed that they had to win the war.